



The
Gateway to a Christian
Home



THE GATEWAY
to a
CHRISTIAN HOME



by
JACOB T. FRIESEN



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THINK OF YOUR WEDDING as the gateway to a Christian home. Every part of your wedding plans must be in keeping with the spirit and atmosphere of the home you hope to build. Begin by planning for a Christian wedding ceremony. Functions coming before and after this service must contribute and not detract.

A Clue from the Past

A quick historical glance reveals a "disappointing uncertainty as to the exact ceremonies or proceedings connected with marriage in Bible times. We paint our picture from passing allusions or descriptions, and from our knowledge of Jewish and Arab customs. In cases it would seem that there was nothing beyond betrothal, or the festivities following it. We find reference to the wedding procession, apparently a relic of

marriage by capture. The first of these proceedings are suggested in Judges 5:30 and Psalm 45:15. The bridegroom's friends (John 3:29) went usually by night, to fetch the bride and her attendants to the home of the groom (Matthew 9:15, John 3:29). The joyousness of it all is witnessed by the proverbial 'voice of the bridegroom,' and the cry, 'Behold the bridegroom cometh!' " (Jeremiah 7:34; Revelation 18:23).¹ The marriage supper then followed, generally in the home of the groom. "There is no formal religious ceremony connected with the Hebrew marriage as with us. There is not a hint of such a thing in the Bible. The marriage was consummated by entrance into the chamber, i.e. nuptial chamber."²

In the New Testament the keynote is struck by our Lord's action. "The significance of His attending the marriage feast at Cana and performing the first miracle there can hardly be exaggerated. The act corresponds, too, with His teaching on the subject. He, no

¹GEORGE B. EAGER. "Marriage (1915)," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 1998.

²*Ibid.*

less than Paul, emphasizes both the honorableness of the estate and the heinousness of all sins against it."³ We may draw invaluable teaching from the concept Jesus had of marriage and the relation of man and wife from the parallels he draws in explaining the kingdom of God, but this does not add to our understanding of the ceremony and the elements which constituted the consummation of this marriage relationship.

We are told that in the early church under the leadership of the Holy Ghost the church blessed the marriage vows on the strength of Colossians 3:17, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." D. D. Klaassen, of Homewood, Manitoba, in a very helpful paper presented at the Canadian General Conference, 1953, quotes Zeller's Dictionary as stating: "The church leaders and the deaconesses were present; groom and bride met before the Lord's table and partook of the Lord's Supper and presented a common offering. In the prayer connected with the ob-

³*Ibid.*

servance of the Supper God's blessing was asked to be especially upon the marriage. Great value was attached to this church blessing by the early Christians."

Regarding our own tradition, we can gather from occasional references that among other emphases the church's blessing of the marriage vow was also filled with new significance. As we come down to the present a varied and confused picture of traditions, customs, and socially acceptable practices surrounds "uniting the man and woman in the holy estate of matrimony."

Misleading Advice

Emily Post in her 740 page book, *Etiquette*, devotes 13 pages to preparing for the wedding, 42 pages to the wedding day with full page photographs of church interiors, flower displays, and furniture arrangement. Then she ventures forth with this bit of wisdom, "A completely beautiful wedding is not merely a combination of wonderful flowers, beautiful clothes, smoothness of detail, delicious food. These, though all necessary, are external attributes. The spirit, or soul of it must have something besides and that 'some-

thing is in the behavior and the expression of the bride and groom.' "

Marjorie Binford Woods in her 224 page book entitled *Your Wedding, How to Plan and Enjoy It*, devotes an entire volume just to advise young brides and grooms. Among the many pages of "helpful hints" is the following suggestion on music: "Music favorites, *At Dawning, O Promise Me, I Love You Truly, Ah Sweet Mystery of Life* seem to be invariable as vocal music Any selection of high type that you wish may be included on your musical program A helpful hint on the subject of drinks, Champagne is the classic wedding beverage. Just to hear the corks pop is exhilarating in itself."

Let us not be deceived. God is not mocked! The ideas you sow in your mind and heart as bride and groom you will reap in your wedding ceremony. Misleading advice has led to an assortment of wedding ceremonies now being enacted which defies description.

One Impression

Every wedding ceremony makes one dominant impression to the careful observer. This

may be deliberately planned or unintentional. The arrangement, the manner in which each part is carried out, the time involved to carry out each phase, the words and thoughts conveyed either by message, prayer, or song, and the setting of the ceremony will determine the emphasis or dominant impression left upon the participants and guests. Following are some types of wedding ceremonies.

Procession Centered

There is a difference between a procession and a parade. In a parade each part draws maximum attention to itself. This occurs in a wedding ceremony when each member of the wedding party enters and moves all the way to his destination before the next member enters. A procession, according to Webster, is a "progression as of a series: continuous course." In a procession each member is lost in the movement of the whole. The only possible attention could fall on the bride. Parades make wedding ceremonies procession-centered.

Display Centered

Elaborate displays of flowers never accord-

ed an individual in a modest church whether he be dead or alive tip the scale in the direction of a display. Impressive candle-lighting, ring bearers, flower girls, attendants, maids of honor, escorts, as in the case where the father brings in the bride, best men, ushers, and usherettes, all of these find no parallel in any phase of our church or religious experience in history or today. Therefore, we need not be surprised to find that we are carried away by the drama and display. If we add to this: color schemes, matching dresses, flowing veils and trains, we need no further explanation why we remember our weddings by everything but its Christian character.

Bride Centered

A more subtle error into which perhaps the majority of weddings fall is the bride-centered ceremony. We are anxious to give honor where honor is due, and for most girls this experience will come but once. The bride as the logical climax of the procession and the need of being dressed more elaborately than the attendants tends to place her on a pedestal. The fact that she enters long after

the groom has made his appearance and not on the arm of the groom emphasizes her unique role. Music with bride-centered words and sentiments add emphasis. The result is not surprising — a bride-centered wedding ceremony.

Christ Centered

Every element of an elaborate wedding ceremony aspires to become its organizing center. The Christian wedding ceremony to be worthy of that title must be Christ-centered. Prerequisites are a Christ-centered personal faith of bride and groom, a Christ-centered parental home, and a Christ-centered church. A Christian wedding ceremony is impossible without this trinity. Paul's words cannot be misread. "He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that

in everything he might be pre-eminent" (Colossians 1:15-18). Peter is more specific when he states, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" "And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that we prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

Your authority in planning and evaluating a wedding ceremony cannot be Emily Post, local customs, or even Mennonite tradition. You must begin with a clear vision of Christ as presented in the Bible. Accept the aims and standard He set for you as an individual, home, and church. From this vantage point you can rise above petty practices and sentimental symbols to a Christian wedding ceremony.

A wedding ceremony is Christ-centered:

(1) When music is played and sung which conveys a Christian message and recalls the highest religious associations. Popular religious songs with a semi-Christian message do not recall religious associations.

(2) When the procession and display contributes rather than detracts from the formal service.

(3) When appropriate Scriptures are read, message spoken, and prayers prayed.

(4) When the printed form used by the minister gives prominence to biblical and Christ-honoring significance of the vows to be taken.

(5) When the bride and groom, and guests leave with a sense of having been with Jesus.

Remember you are in God's house. A spirit of worship with traditional church music of praise and honor to God should be the dominant note in a wedding ceremony. A modest arrangement of flowers will add atmosphere as it does to every worship service. An elaborate candle-lighting service and attendants beyond the bridesmaid and best man, who may also serve as witnesses, will tend to take

a disproportionate amount of time and thus draw attention to itself. Candles may be lighted before the guests arrive. The procession must not be a parade. The recessional must be natural and orderly. A rushed exit will draw needless attention to itself and therefore mar the Christian and spiritual impression for all present.

A Joint Promise

Wedding ceremony forms usually direct two identical questions to the bride and groom to be answered "I do" or "I will." After having answered these questions individually the bride and groom should have the opportunity to answer a question in which they may say "We do" or "We will." The question might be worded as follows:
As you now recall your personal commitment to Christ at the time of your baptism, and your consecration to Him and His service, do you now renew this pledge and endeavor by the grace of God to establish a home in which Christ shall be the Head, in which His love shall be practiced, His Word will be read and His Church shall be honored and upheld? If you are willing to assume

this obligation, then answer with one heart and one mind, We do! The element of personal and joint consecration to Christ would help to make your wedding service more Christ-centered.

Music

A tract entitled, *Planning a Church Wedding Ceremony*, prepared by the Illinois Mennonite Conference gives this suggestion regarding music. "The note of consecration should also be evident in the songs that are sung (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Many of the popular wedding songs are characterized by bride-centered sentiments and do not have a high spiritual uplift, nor do they stress the true meaning of Christian love. Choose songs which express your loyal devotion and consecration to Christ as the Head of your home." The following hymns found in our *Mennonite Hymnary* are suggestive: *O Happy Home, Where Thou Art Loved; O Perfect Love; O Holy Saviour; There Is Beauty All Around; Lead Us, O Father, in the Paths of Peace; Holy Father, Cheer Our Way; May the Grace of Christ Our Saviour; In Heavenly Love Abiding;*

Take Thou My Hand, O Father; The Lord's Prayer in various arrangements is most appropriate. Any hymn with an appropriate message may be chosen.

Scriptures

You will find guidance and inspiration as you plan your wedding to read and study the following Scripture passages. You may become impressed with one or the other passage so that you will want to suggest that your pastor use it in your wedding: Psalm 91; Psalm 23; Psalm 121; Matthew 5:1-16; Matthew 19:3-6; John 2:1-11; I Corinthians 13; Romans 12; Ephesians 5:22-23; Colossians 1:15-18; I Peter 3:1-7.

Picture Taking

Nothing will detract attention from the wedding service as much as a flash bulb. Arrange with your photographer or whoever will have a camera to take a few minutes before or after the reception to go through the various stages of the service of which pictures are desired. No flash bulb should be seen before or during the wedding service.

Reporting

The newspaper account of a Christian wedding ceremony often nullifies its witness to the public by the detail it reports in dress, flowers, attendants, guests, without conveying the spirit which was actually present. The content of this report cannot be left to the society editor of the local newspaper. This account must give proper emphasis to the spiritual character of the hymns, Scriptures, prayers, meditation, and vows.

The Honored Guest

The Christian wedding ceremony which is Christ-centered will convey to you, the bride and groom, friends present, as well as the reading public that Christ was not only present but that He was the honored guest.

"May the grace of Christ my Saviour,
And the Father's boundless love
With the Holy Spirit's favor,
Rest upon us from above.

"Thus may we abide in union
With each other and the Lord,
And possess, in sweet communion,
Joys which earth cannot afford."

—JOHN NEWTON
Mennonite Hymnary



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